



**DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE  
ARMED SERVICES BLOOD PROGRAM OFFICE  
5109 LEESBURG PIKE  
FALLS CHURCH, VA 22041-3258**



REPLY TO  
ATTENTION OF

ASBPO (40-2b)

BPL 03-08  
1 September 2003

**MEMORANDUM FOR SEE DISTRIBUTION**


**SUBJECT: Blood Donor Deferral for Leishmaniasis Exposure in Iraq**

1. The Armed Services Blood Program Office (ASBPO) was established by the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Health Affairs to coordinate the blood programs of the Military Services and the Unified Commands. In that respect, the ASBPO is issuing Blood Program Letter (BPL) 03-08 notifying the Services of a new donor deferral for *Leishmania* exposure in Iraq.
2. Leishmaniasis is an endemic disease transmitted by sand flies in Iraq as well as other parts of the world including the Middle East, Mediterranean Coast, Asia, Africa, Central America and South America. There are two primary disease manifestations in Iraq, cutaneous and visceral. These diseases are caused by several species of the parasite *Leishmania*. The incubation period can vary from 10 days to years, but is generally 2-6 months and results in a chronic infection. Leishmaniasis is known to be transmitted by blood; there have been at least six cases of transfusion-acquired leishmaniasis reported in the literature. Additionally, *Leishmania tropica* has been demonstrated to survive in blood products stored under standard blood bank conditions for 25 days. Given this data, it is prudent to defer potential donors who are exposed to leishmaniasis in addition to the current permanent deferral for a diagnosis of leishmaniasis.
3. Conditions around Talil Air Base in Iraq have produced an environment favorable to sand fly reproduction. Vector monitoring at Talil reports a large sand fly population in and around the base. Polymerase Chain Reaction (PCR) testing of sand fly samples from this area indicate that approximately 2% of the sand flies captured are infected with *Leishmania*. Positive vector monitoring has also detected *Leishmania sp* infected sand flies at Baghdad International Airport. Various infectious disease agencies list northern and central Iraq to include Baghdad and Mosul as infective areas. To date, nine cases of leishmaniasis have been diagnosed in US military personnel in CY 2003. Given this information, it is apparent that the US military population is at risk for leishmaniasis and could pose a risk to the blood supply upon redeployment.

4. Currently, potential donors who have traveled to or resided in the northern provinces and the southern province of Basrah in Iraq are deferred from donation due to malarial risk. These areas do not include those now experiencing the *Leishmania* outbreak. Hence, the malaria deferral will not cover the leishmaniasis risk as occurs in other countries such as Afghanistan. Therefore, a deferral must be established for the remainder of the country.

5. To mitigate the risk of *Leishmania* in Iraq to the US blood supply, the ASPBO is implementing a 1 year deferral for all personnel who have traveled to or lived in Iraq (12 months from the last date of departure from Iraq). This deferral should be implemented as soon as possible but no later than 30 October 2003. Lookback is not required. This deferral has been discussed with the Food and Drug Administration's Division of Emerging Transfusion Transmitted Infections, Center for Biologics Evaluation and Research and various infectious disease and preventative medicine organizations within DoD. The Malaria/vCJD Risk Countries List is in the process of being revised to include this and other information and will be published under separate cover. Until publication, pen and ink the following comment under the country "IRAQ" in the comment section "Leishmaniasis risk, defer donor for 1 year from the last date of departure of Iraq."

6. **Service Blood Program Officers and Combatant Command Joint Blood Program Officers** must complete the enclosed form, *Acknowledgment of Receipt and Implementation*, (Enclosed) and return the signed original or fax copy to the ASBPO NLT **10 October 2003**. A copy of all Service policy documents/letters implementing this BPL must also be forwarded to the ASBPO within 30 days of implementation. I am the point of contact for this action and can be reached at DSN 761-8024, commercial (703) 681-8024, or via e-mail at [ruth.sylvester@otsg.amedd.army.mil](mailto:ruth.sylvester@otsg.amedd.army.mil).

  
RUTH D. SYLVESTER  
Lt Col, USAF, BSC  
Director

1 Enclosure  
as stated

DISTRIBUTION:  
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ARMED SERVICES BLOOD PROGRAM OFFICE  
5109 LEESBURG PIKE  
FALLS CHURCH VA 22041-3248  
703-681-8024/8025

**ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF RECEIPT AND IMPLEMENTATION**

**Service Blood Program Officers and Combatant Command JBPOs only:** Complete this Acknowledgment of Receipt and Implementation and retain one copy in your file. Return the signed original or fax copy to the Armed Services Blood Program Office  
**NLT 30 October 2003.**

BPL 03-08

Blood Donor Deferral for Leishmaniasis Exposure in Iraq

15 October 2003

The document listed above was received and the policy implemented by:

SERVICE/UNIFIED COMMAND: \_\_\_\_\_

DATE RECEIVED: \_\_\_\_\_

DATE IMPLEMENTED/OR: \_\_\_\_\_

PROJECTED IMPLEMENTATION

SIGNATURE: \_\_\_\_\_

NAME/TITLE: \_\_\_\_\_

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For ASBPO use only  
Date Returned: \_\_\_\_\_

Enclosure



HEALTH AFFAIRS

OFFICE OF THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

WASHINGTON, DC 20301-1200

OCT 02 2003

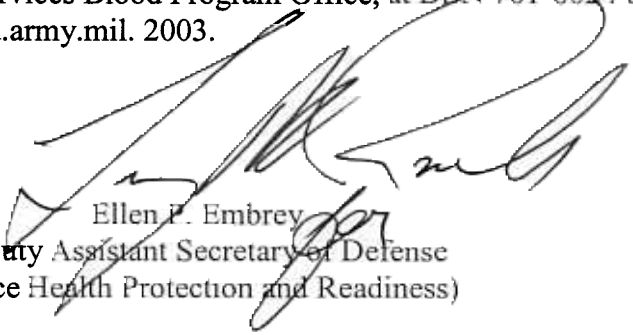
MEMORANDUM FOR SURGEON GENERAL OF THE ARMY  
SURGEON GENERAL OF THE NAVY  
SURGEON GENERAL OF THE AIR FORCE

SUBJECT: Blood Donor Deferral for Leishmaniasis in Iraq

Leishmaniasis is a parasitic infection caused by *Leishmania sp.* It is transmitted through the bite of sand flies and is endemic to certain areas of the world, to include Iraq. *Leishmania tropica* has been proven to survive in blood products stored under standard conditions and there have been at least six cases of transfusion-transmitted cases of Leishmaniasis reported in the literature. The incubation period for a leishmaniasis infection can range from 10 days to years, but is generally 2 to 6 months.

Several cases of leishmaniasis have recently been diagnosed in US military members deployed to Iraq where the disease is known to be endemic. Donors with symptomatic infections would be detected by routine donor history screening procedures. However, due to the potential lag period before symptoms can appear, there is a risk that a donor can be infected and not be aware of it. Based on this information, the Armed Services Blood Program Office is implementing a 1 year deferral for all personnel who traveled to or resided in Iraq as a precaution to mitigate any potential risk to the blood supply.

The Army, Navy, and Air Force Blood Programs will implement this deferral as soon as possible, but no later than 30 October 2003. The point of contact for this matter is Lt Col Ruth D. Sylvester, Director, Armed Services Blood Program Office, at DSN 761-8024 or (703) 681-8024, ruth.sylvester@otsg.amedd.army.mil. 2003.

  
Ellen P. Embrey  
Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense  
(Force Health Protection and Readiness)

Attachments:  
As stated